

Frosted fakes turn up to fool more experts

By Roger Boye

Hobby sleuths have discovered still more cleverly doctored coins that had fooled several expert collectors.

The latest "finds" involve genuine Morgan silver dollars from the late 1800s that forgers had coated with fine layers of silver granules. To novices, the coins appear to sport beautiful "proof-like" surfaces worth huge premiums on the coin market.

For an extreme example, an uncirculated 1891-O silver dollar might retail for just \$75 if it has an uneven shine and the typical smattering of small nicks known as "bagmarks." The same piece with a flawless, frosted finish might fetch \$2,500 or more.

Con artists could have added the silver coating with some form of electroplating, suggested a coin authenticator for the International Numismatic Society [INS]. Experts working for the INS and for the American Numismatic Association reported discovery of the phony finishes.

"The easiest way to detect coins altered using this new process is to look for a build-up of granules in the recesses of the design," said F. Michael Fazzari of the INS, who was quoted in a press release. "We caution collectors from trying to scrape their coins to determine if the luster is original as this will result in damage to many genuine coins."

He added that one luckless investor had more than 40 artificially frosted dollars in his collection.

Meanwhile, hobby pros recommend that persons buying rare keepsakes do business with longstanding dealers who can detect fakes or who guarantee to refund the purchase price if the coins are proved forgeries.

● Publishers of the hobby's largest reference book—the Standard Catalog of World Coins, by Chester L. Krause and Clifford Mishler—say they have made more than 192,000 price changes in the recently released 1984 [10th] edition.

The nearly 2,000-page tome includes the current "retail values" for most coins issued in the world since the late 1700s, more than 75,000 items from 1,300 governments. An "instant identifier" section helps collectors match a coin with its country of origin, as do thousands of photographs.

For a copy, visit a coin shop or send \$32.50 to Krause Publications, 700 E. State St., Iola, Wis. 54990.

● More than 125 coin dealers will converge on Peoria late this week for the annual convention of the Illinois Numismatic Association. The huge sales area will be open from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Friday, 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Saturday and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. next Sunday at the Continental Regency Hotel, 500 Hamilton Blvd. Admission is free.